



A REVIEW ON MANUSCRIPTOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

A manuscript is a hand written document of scientific, historical, philosophical or aesthetic value, which is at least seventy five years old. The scientific study of manuscripts is called manuscriptology. It includes the steps like collection, conservation, cataloguing, transcription, translation, critical edition and publication of manuscripts. India has an estimate of five million manuscripts, probably the largest collection in the world. These cover various subjects like literature, medicine, philosophy etc. The fact is that, there is a considerable amount of manuscripts still unexplored and unpublished. Manuscripts are subjected to deterioration due to various factors. So it is the need of the hour to conduct exploratory researches on manuscripts. This will aid the preservation of the knowledge unrevealed in ancient manuscripts.

KEYWORDS: Manuscriptology, Manuscripts, Critical edition, Lower criticism.

INTRODUCTION:

In ancient times, the knowledge was transmitted verbally from generation to generation. Later the system of writing emerged and developed gradually from inscriptions to hand written documents. This enabled the preservation of ancient knowledge for the future generation. A handwritten composition on paper, palm leaf, birch bark, cloth, metal or any other material which has significant scientific, historical, philosophical or aesthetic value is called a manuscript. The scientific study, which includes various steps like collection, conservation, cataloguing, transcription, translation, critical edition and publication of manuscripts is called manuscriptology.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

Literary review on manuscriptology was done by consulting text books, articles in authorized journals and official website of National Mission for Manuscripts.

Etymology and synonyms of the term 'manuscript':

The term manuscript is originated from the Latin word 'manuscriptus', where manu means hand and scriptus means to write, which means any hand written document is called manuscript. Codex, Document, Text, Script, Handwriting are the synonyms of the term manuscript.¹

Definition of manuscript:

Antiquities and art treasures act, 1972 consider manuscripts as antiquities. It defines manuscript as that which is of scientific, historical, literary or aesthetic value and which has been in existence for not less than seventy-five years.²

Manuscript wealth of India:

India possesses an estimate of five million manuscripts, probably the largest in the world.³ These cover various subjects like literature, medicine, philosophy, science, history etc. The fact is that, these manuscripts lie scattered across the country and beyond, in various institutions as well as private collections, often unattended and undocumented. It is essential to preserve, explore and publish the valuable knowledge unrevealed in these manuscripts. National Mission for Manuscripts (NMM) is a national level initiative aiming to locate, document and preserve the vast manuscript wealth of India.

Steps in Manuscriptology:

Manuscriptology is the branch of science, which specializes on collection, conservation and editing of ancient manuscripts. It includes various steps;

Table No 1: Steps in manuscriptology

Primary steps	Secondary steps
Collection	Transcription
Conservation	Translation
Cataloguing	Critical edition
	Publication

Collection:

Collection of manuscripts from various sources is the first step in manuscriptology. So many manuscripts are found in academic institutions, museums, trusts, religious institutions, research institutions, libraries and private cus-

tody of some families.

Conservation:

The process of enhancing the life and preventing damage of manuscripts is called Conservation. Manuscripts may subject to damage due to certain factors. These factors of deterioration are;

1. Human factors:

Ignorance and carelessness of personnel in charge of manuscript collections or individuals who possess private collection of manuscripts may lead to the deterioration of manuscripts.

2. Natural factors:

Manuscripts are damaged on exposure to natural factors like;

- Fire, water, dust etc
- Natural calamities
- Environmental pollution
- Fluctuation in temperature and relative humidity
- Microbial attack
- Insect attack - Eg: cockroaches, termites, book worms

3. Inherent factors:

The nature of materials used for writing, ink or paint applied can also be a danger to manuscripts.

Types of conservation of manuscripts are;

Preventive conservation: Any direct/indirect action on a damaged or undamaged manuscript or collection of manuscripts aimed at enhancing the life of manuscripts by reducing the future risks of deterioration is called preventive conservation. Some of the preventive conservation methods are;

- Regular inspection of the condition of manuscripts
- Pest control/ regular DDT spray, fumigation
- Air conditioned room for keeping the manuscripts
- Glass or aluminium racks for storage
- Modern techniques like lamination, xeroxing, scanning, microfilming and digitalization

Curative conservation:

Any direct action on a damaged manuscript or collection of manuscripts aimed at stopping active deterioration is called curative conservation.

- Fumigation of a manuscript collection that has live insects in it
- Repairing of manuscripts by using tissue paper and glue

Cataloguing:

Cataloguing is the process of classifying and arranging the manuscripts in a particular order. It helps to locate the available manuscripts easily in a short time period. Many types of catalogues are available based on differences in physical form and extent of information enclosed. Typically catalogues can be prepared in;

- Card form
- Book form
- Sheaf form

The two types of catalogues are normal catalogues and descriptive catalogues.

1. Normal catalogue:

In normal catalogue, serial number, date, accession number, title, author's name, condition of the manuscript are included. Manuscripts are arranged and stored according to its nature, size etc.

2. Descriptive catalogue:

A descriptive catalogue consists of two parts. The first part gives general information such as title, author and condition of the manuscript. Second part contains the summary of the contents of manuscript. A few lines from beginning and ending are included.

Some of the important catalogues of Indian manuscripts are;

- **New Catalogus Catalogorum (NCC):** NCC is an alphabetical register of Sanskrit and allied works, published by university of madras. 42 volumes of NCC are published till now. But one of the major drawbacks of NCC is that the information is not widely accessible.
- **Bharatiya Kriti Sampada⁴:** It is the national database of manuscripts which contains information of various Indian manuscript titles, themes, authors, commentaries, scripts, languages etc. It was established by National Mission for Manuscripts, an autonomous organization under the Ministry of Tourism and Culture, Government of India.
- Online library catalogue of Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA)
- Online digital library catalogue of Muktabodha Indological Research Institute
- A Catalogue of South Indian Manuscripts by Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, library collection
- Sanskrit Medical Manuscripts in India: It is a book compiled by B Rama Rao, published for Central Council for Research in Ayurveda & Siddha, Department of Ayush, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India comes under the genre of catalogues.
- A History of Indian Medical Literature: It is a work by G Jan Meulenbeld, published under the auspices of the J Gonda Foundation, Royal Netherlands Academy for Arts and Sciences. In five volumes, titles of various Sanskrit medical texts and their authors are enlisted.

In addition to these catalogues, various manuscript libraries have their own catalogue containing details of the manuscripts preserved.

Transcription:

It is the process of writing the text as it is into a plain paper. As the direct reading of manuscript is difficult, transcription will help to read it in a better way.

Translation:

The process of converting language of the text into another is called translation. Manuscripts are available in different languages and by translation, a person from another place and culture can easily understand the contents of the text.

Critical edition:

Reconstruction of the text by close reading and detailed analysis of the contents is called critical edition. It requires collation of different versions of the same text. The most trust worthy version is considered as base manuscript. The process of critical edition is carried out by selecting the original reading or the one which is closer to author's intention from the available different readings. This requires detailed study of the sources, literary and historical aspects of the text. The two steps involved in critical edition are; Lower criticism and Higher criticism.

I. Lower criticism:

It is the process of identification of different copies of a manuscript and selection of a reading which is the original or more appropriate to the context. This is done in three steps;

1. Heuristics
2. Recension
3. Emendation

1. Heuristics:

Methodological collection, analysis and study of all the evidences with respect to the manuscript is termed as heuristics. Further, it is done in three stages;

a) Assignment of siglum:

Siglum is a special identification mark given to the manuscript for easy understanding of a particular copy of it, in which the reading belongs to. Siglum could be based on the script, source of the manuscript, age of the copy or combination of any of these. Eg: K13 indicate a manuscript from Kashmir, belongs to 13th century.

b) Collation:

Collation is the process of collecting all the information regarding the manuscript in one document. It is done with a specially prepared collation sheet. Now a days, excel spreadsheet is used for this purpose. Collation sheets are prepared by drawing horizontal and vertical lines so as to get small grids wide enough to write single letters. In this way each letters of the available copies are compared. In due course the relationship between different copies of the manuscript and their genealogy can be appreciated.

c) Exploration of secondary sources of evidence:

Secondary sources of evidence are the works which are directly and closely related to the manuscript, but not the source manuscript. These can be any commentaries, translations, anthologies, or parallel versions of the source manuscript. These evidences will provide additional information regarding variants of readings, authorship etc and will be helpful in critical edition.

2. Recension:

Recension is the process of choosing among the variants of a reading, which is the original or more close to author's intention.

3. Emendation:

It is the process of making revision or correction of texts. Sometimes, editor of the text may not be satisfied with the available evidences or the variant of reading may not be grammatically and metrically fit into the context. In these cases, editor may suggest an emendation. It is far from being just an educated guess, it requires a close study of the text in its cultural and historical context and must be preceded by a thorough analysis of all versions of the reading that to be edited.

II. Higher criticism:

While lower criticism involves identification, comparison, collation and other processes that go towards the selection of readings, higher criticism involves an assessment of author's work. Higher criticism probes the following; style, language, literary aspects, sources of the work, life of the author, circumstances made the author to compose the work, influence of other writers in the field, Influence of the author on other writers in the field, reasons for the popularity of the work and its role in society.⁵ This process needs good command on subject as well as language.

Publication:

It is the final step in manuscriptology. Critically edited manuscripts are published with the assistance of print media or internet. The very disappointing fact is that only 2% of the available materials from medical manuscripts are in printed form.⁶ Hence it is essential to publish the explored manuscripts, so as to make it available for research community. This will pave way to further studies and will add up to the existing knowledge.

CONCLUSION:

Manuscripts are the evidences of our documentary heritage. So as to explore the knowledge unrevealed in these ancient manuscripts a systematic approach is needed. Manuscriptology includes the scientific methods of collection, conservation, cataloguing and editing of manuscripts. Exploratory researches in the field of manuscriptology is essential for the preservation of ancient knowledge. Proper training of the personnel involved in the research in specific areas of manuscriptology and incorporation of advanced technologies will be beneficial for improving the quality of research.

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